

SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
Best Western
M-28 East
Wetmore, Michigan
December 2, 2004

Chairman Manson called the meeting of the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SAC) to order at 9:33 a.m., Thursday, December 2, 2004 in Wetmore, Michigan.

Members Present:

Bill Manson, Region III, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Grand Rapids
Elza Inman, Grant Sponsor, Brethren
James Duke, Region I, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Munising
Bill Lucas, Region II, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Cadillac
Lee Murray, At-Large, Hopkins
Jack Nelson, Business Community, Greenville
Orville Olson, Representative at Large, Ludington

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Randy Charles, US Forest Service
Anne Okonek, Hiawatha National Forest

Staff Present:

Lt. Creig Grey, Law Enforcement Division (LED), Lansing
Richard Kennedy, Forest, Mineral and Fire Management (FMFM), Lansing
Jim Radabaugh, State Trails Coordinator, FMFM, Lansing
Steve Kubisiak, Recreation and Trails Program Coordinator, FMFM, Lansing
Ron Yesney, FMFM, Marquette
Curt Bacon, LED, Marquette
Dan Moore, FMFM, Eastern UP
Loretta Cwalinski, FMFM, Gaylord
Charlie Vallier, FMFM, Naubinway

MINUTES

Motion by Mr. Duke to approve the minutes of the September 28, 2004 Snowmobile Advisory Committee meeting, seconded by Mr. Inman. Motion passed unanimously.

Haywire/Coalwood Grade ORV Trail Designation Proposal - **Anne Okonek** introduced Dick Anderson, District Ranger, who initiated the request to designate the Haywire/Coalwood Grade as part of the State's ORV Trail System. She noted the ORV Board endorsed designation at their November, 2004 meeting. **Mr. Anderson** said the proposed designation has local government support and believes designation would help local economies.

Mr. Manson asked if the ORV Board supports the trail designation. **Mr. Kubisiak** reported the ORV Board passed a motion in support contingent upon a Memorandum-Of-Understanding (MOU) between the State and the Forest Service, and that this designation is not construed as precedence setting.

Mr. Murray asked if there were use conflicts between snowmobiles and ORV's during the winter, and if snowmobile funds would be used for summer maintenance. **Ms. Okonek** reported the trail is open to ORV use in the winter and that no use conflicts have been reported to-date. She said ORV funds would be used for summer maintenance. Discussion ensued.

Mr. Olson asked if there is law enforcement funding available. **Mr. Kubisiak** reported grant assistance is available to local Sheriff Departments provided the county has State designated ORV trails. **Mr. Olson** expressed concern with winter ORV use on trails. **Mr. Manson** said that probably wouldn't be an issue.

Motion by Mr. Inman to support the designation of the Haywire and Coalwood Grade as part of the State's designated ORV trail system, seconded by Mr. Duke.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Manson called for a vote.

Manson – Yea

Duke – Yea

Murray – Yea

Inman – Yea

Lucus -- Yea

Mr. Olson – Nay

Mr. Nelson -- Nay

Motion carried.

Hancock-Ripley Snowmobile Trail -- **Mr. Manson** reported the Hancock-Ripley Snowmobile Trail will be open to snowmobiling this winter. **Mr. Yesney** added that summer use will be restricted in areas of concern.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Gaylord-Cheboygan Work Group – **Mr. Manson** reported the work group is working on a reroute proposal around the Pigeon River Country. The next workgroup meeting is December 15th.

Senate Bill 1329 -- **Mr. Manson** reported Senate Bill 1329 was reported out of House Committee. The bill would allow snowmobiling in the rights-of-way of limited access highways. MDOT opposes the bill as written. Discussion ensued regarding DNR support of the bill. **Mr. Radabaugh** clarified the DNR has deferred to MDOT as the lead agency on this issue and that the DNR could work with the legislation if it is passed.

Long-Range Planning Committee – **Mr. Olson** reported that everything is in place to purchase snowmobile trail maps except funding. He is working with Mr. Radabaugh.

Mr. Olson reported the emergency response program has challenges although they are still working on a uniform statewide system.

Mr. Murray asked if the emergency signs would need to be removed and put back up with the seasons. He noted global positioning (GPS) coordinates and new cell phone technology may also provide alternatives to an intensive signing program.

Mr. Radabaugh reported this issue has been discussed with Forest, Mineral and Fire Management's Management Team. He said the DNR recognizes that there is not a statewide standard and that local emergency response systems may be developed and implemented on a local basis. Discussion ensued.

Tom Gallagher displayed a sign from the Roscommon area for a 911 system and explained how their system worked. **Dora Freeborg** said Roscommon County likes their numbering system.

Mr. Olson reported he is still collecting grooming and administration cost estimates from the sponsors and that the workgroup is addressing this issue.

Finance Subcommittee – Mr. Inman reported the finance subcommittee hasn't met since the last meeting but said he believes that fuel costs reimbursements need to be revisited immediately. **Mr. Manson** agreed and said that fuel costs were not considered as part of the \$3.50/mile grooming rate. He believes there is a need for an immediate fuel cost adjustment because of rising fuel costs. **Mr. Radabaugh** said this issue is under review by the Snowmobile Workgroup and it will be discussed at the next workgroup meeting.

Mr. Inman expressed concern with the administrative process relating to equipment grants and delays with equipment acquisition and reimbursements. Discussion ensued.

Motion by Mr. Murray recommending the DNR consider establishing one equipment grant cycle per year, at the end of the grooming season, to assure enough time is built into the process to allow equipment acquisition by the beginning of the next grooming season. Motion seconded by Mr. Lucas. The one round schedule was recommended to begin in fiscal year 2006. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Snowmobile Program Work Group – Mr. Radabaugh reported the Resource Management Deputy formed a workgroup to identify and resolve issues relating to the snowmobile program. Primary issues include: grooming costs, fuel costs, administrative costs, DNR staffing and signage. The first meeting was held last Monday in Roscommon and the next meeting is scheduled for December 21, 2004. The meetings are being facilitated by MSU Cooperative Extension. **Mr. Radabaugh** and Mr. Manson believe the first meeting was productive.

Motorized Trail Signing Handbook -- Mr. Manson asked about the progress on updating the Snowmobile Trail Signing Manual. **Mr. Kubisiak** reported work still needs to be done and said it will encompass all motorized trails. He noted that he previously requested input from the SAC, ORV Board and USDA Forest Service but has not received any comments. He encourages comments so they can be considered as the manual is being worked on. **Mr. Radabaugh** said they are working with MDOT for consistency, and that the manual will get more attention in January. Completion is expected mid-year. Discussion ensued.

STAFF REPORTS

Equipment Grant Status – Mr. Kennedy reported letters were mailed to eligible sponsors and the requests are due December 8th. No responses have been received to date. Once the letters of intent are received, a list will be compiled and forwarded to the State Administrative Board for approval.

Grooming Grant Status – Mr. Kennedy reported most of the grants are executed but there is one club waiting on required documentation. Several other clubs do not have an authorization memo from the Unit Manager. **Mr. Inman** questioned why some of the Unit Managers have not authorized the grant if all the required documentation is in order. **Mr. Kennedy** reported he followed-up with the units but have not received responses in all cases. **Mr. Murray** requested Mr. Kennedy follow-up with the Unit Managers and advise Mr. Manson why his previous inquiries were not answered.

Amasa Trail Proposal -- **Mr. Yesney** reported the trail proposal has been submitted to the Resource Division Chiefs for approval. Once the proposal is officially approved the sponsor may proceed with trail development. He said the project is moving forward, but noted the new trail segment and bridge will not be completed until next year. Discussion ensued.

2003-2004 Fatal Crash Report – Tabled until January meeting.

2004-05 Snowmobile Law Enforcement Grants – **Lt. Grey** distributed a list of approved Snowmobile Law Enforcement Grants. He noted that a change in the boiler plate legislation has broadened the distribution potential of grant recipients and asked the SAC for clarification on eligibility criteria. **Lt. Grey** explained a current criterion requires counties to have designated snowmobile trails within their jurisdiction in order to be eligible for funding assistance. He noted three counties requested funding for lake patrols and were denied because they do not have designated trails.

Mr. Manson said the initial premise behind raising the snowmobile registration fee was for trail enforcement. It was clearly not intended for road or lake patrols. He said the change in match requirements was intended to increase participation in counties with designated trails. **Mr. Manson** recommended maintaining the status-quo through the 2005-06 season. He would like to encourage counties with designated trails to increase patrols on the trails. If funds remain unallocated after review at the end of the 2005-06 season the DNR should consider funding lake patrols. Discussion ensued.

Lt. Grey said the DNR will be reviewing the criteria with the Michigan Sheriffs Association and would like to work with the SAC Law Enforcement Subcommittee on this issue.

Mr. Manson said the Michigan Snowmobile Association is 100% behind law enforcement with appropriate controls.

Chocolay Township Speed Limits – **Mr. Yesney** reported field recommendations regarding speed limits have been forwarded to the Acting Chief of Forest, Mineral and Fire Management. **Mr. Radabaugh** said this issue is currently under review with the Chief and the Resource Management Deputy.

Mr. Manson announced he will be attending a meeting with Chocolay Township officials, local DNR and Law Enforcement officials, on December 20, 2004.

Dennis Stachewicz, Chocolay Township Planner, thanked the SAC for the opportunity to address them and reiterated the Township's willingness to work with everyone. He asked the SAC to reconsider their position concerning speed limits. He is hopeful of reaching a middle ground solution and believes this could be a showcase example for other areas of the state. **Mr. Manson** said he looks forward to meeting with the Township and is hopeful a consensus will be reached.

Mr. Yesney, Western Upper Peninsula, reported he is continuing efforts with Canadian National on several rail-road crossing permits. He is working on a number of snowmobile trail reroutes. He conveyed the SAC message at Pre-season Sponsor Meetings to remove snowmobile trail signs and install gates on private lands that have problems with illegal ORV use during the non-snow season. He reported a recreation plan was recently completed by the Keweenaw Point Advisory Committee which included recommendations for a looped snowmobile trail with spurs to points of interest.

Mr. Moore, Eastern Upper Peninsula, reported the Red Creek Bridge is complete. He handed out a letter he received from MDOT in Newberry regarding six "snowmobile crossing" signs that will be removed from State highways. He noted the letter indicated these signs are being

removed because they no longer qualify for MDOT signing. **Mr. Manson** said it is MDOT's responsibility to remove the signs.

Randy Charles, Ottawa National Forest, commended the Michigan Snowmobile Association for their efforts on the Snow Country by-ways project. He thanked Mr. Manson on behalf of the USDA Forest Service. He said the project was a success and included approximately \$1.8 million in acquisition of permanent easements for snowmobile trail purposes.

Mr. Manson said he filed for 501C3 status for the Snow Country Trails Conservancy and is awaiting approval from the Internal Revenue Service. The concept is to use snowmobile funds to purchase permanent easements for snowmobile trails that will be held by the conservancy. He noted the DNR is researching the legalities of this concept. **Mr. Manson** asked Mr. Radabaugh to follow-up on this issue.

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Tom Gallagher, St. Helen Snowpackers, asked Mr. Radabaugh to send him a letter authorizing his club to install emergency signs on the trails. **Mr. Radabaugh** will notify Field Managers to provide guidance on the use of emergency signs.

Mr. Gallagher reported his club was advised by the Roscommon Management Unit to stop using snowmobile grooming equipment to grade trails in the St. Helen Motorsport Area. He said the club owns the equipment out right and asked why they can't use it to grade the motorsport trails. The snowmobile grant manual does not address this issue. Discussion ensued. **Mr. Moore** said that historically there has not been any restriction on how the equipment can be used so long as it doesn't interfere with trail grooming. **Mr. Manson** asked Mr. Radabaugh to look into this situation and to provide clarification on acceptable uses of equipment purchased through the snowmobile program.

Don Britton, Hiawatha Trails, recommended "Gate Ahead" signs be included in the motorized trail signing handbook.

Martin Cottle, Sault Snowmobile Association, does not believe the grooming rates adequately cover sponsor expenses and fuel costs. He recommended a fuel cost adjustment and said his groomer costs were \$18,000 dollars.

John Hauk, Presque Isle Sno-Trails, asked if a re-route has been found around the quarry near Rogers City. Mr. Radabaugh will be meeting with Real-Estate next week regarding a land exchange and potential re-route.

Gail Scott, Gogebic Area Grooming, Incorporated, recommended the grant handbook be improved to include better instructions on how to fill out the forms. **Mr. Manson** said this is another issue that is being addressed by the workgroup.

William Caskey, Jordan Valley Trail Council said he agrees that the handbook and forms need to be improved and suggested a workshop be held to instruct sponsors on how to fill out the forms.

Mary Caskey, Jordan Valley Trail Council, asked if food for volunteers and travel expenses are grant reimbursable items.

Al Green, Cadillac Winter Promotions, thanked the DNR for providing start-up funds prior to the grooming season.

NEXT MEETING

The SAC meeting schedule for 2005 was distributed. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 25, 2005 at BJ's Restaurant & Catering, 990 North Center Street, Gaylord, Michigan.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Public Present:

Tom Myers, Michigan Snowmobile
Association Past President
Denny Zoet, Western Michigan
Snowmobile Council
Bradley Potter, Western Michigan
Snowmobile Council
David Low, Western Michigan
Snowmobile Council
Kaye Houk, Presque Isle Snow Trails
John Houk, Presque Isle Snow Trails
Tom Gallagher, St. Helen Snowpackers,
Heart of North Snow Council
Dora Freeborg, St. Helen Snowpackers
Dennis Stachewicz, Chocolay Township
Don Britton, Hiawatha Trails, Chocolay
Township
Bob Bowers, Alger County Sno-Riders
Dick Anderson, Hiawatha National
Forest
Don Carroll, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile
Club
Bud Martin, Ogemaw Hill Snowmobile
Club
William Caskey, Jordan Valley Trail
Council
Martin Cottle, Sault Snowmobile
Association
Mary Caskey, Jordan Valley Trail
Council
Rick Brown, Michigan Snowmobile
Association
Don Grimm, South West Michigan
Snowstompers
Perry Elliott, Cadillac Winter Warriors
Jim Kostin, Antrim County Snowmobile
Club
Al Green, Cadillac Winter Promotions
Ken Scott, Michigan Snowmobile
Association
Gail Scott, Gogebic Area Grooming
Allen Cottle, Sault Snowmobile
Association
Dale Israels, Michigan Snowmobile
Association Secretary

Mike Lovelace, Marquette County
Sheriff